

Message Text

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C O N F I D E N T I A L SINGAPORE 0254

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: PFOR, SN, MY, BX

SUBJECT: BRITISH ACCOUNT OF NEGOTIATIONS WITH BRUNEI GOVERNMENT

1. MURRAY SIMONS, HEAD OF SOUTHEAST ASIA BRANCH OF FCO, ACCOMPANIED BY UK ACTING HIGH COMMISSIONER SMITH, CALLED ON DCM JANUARY 15 FOR GENERAL DISCUSSION OF SINGAPORE'S POL-ECON SITUATION AND GOS ATTITUDES ON EXTERNAL AFFAIRS. HOWEVER, CONVERSATION FOCUSED MOSTLY ON BRUNEI. SIMONS SAID HE HAD ACCOMPANIED LORD GORONWY-ROBERTS, FCO PARLIAMENTARY UNDER SECRETARY FOR THE HOUSE OF LORDS, DURING HIS VISIT TO BRUNEI FOR OPENING OF NEGOTIATIONS CONCERNING THE FUTURE STATUS OF BRUNEI. HE SAID THAT THE UK HAD PROPOSED THE TERMINATION OF BRITISH RESPONSIBILITY FOR FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND DEFENSE OF BRUNEI AND THE WITHDRAWAL OF THE GHURKA BATTALION SOMETIME IN MID 1978. GIVEN THE BRUNEI GOVERNMENT'S PREVIOUS TOTAL OPPOSITION TO BRITISH EFFORTS TO DISENGAGE IN BRUNEI, THE BRITISH DELEGATION HAD HALF EXPECTED THAT THE BRUNEI GOVERNMENT WOULD REFUSE TO DISCUSS THE BRITISH PROPOSAL. ALTHOUGH THE BRUNEI GOVERNMENT'S REACTION WAS GENERALLY NEGATIVE AND SERI BEGAWAN IS STILL THE MAIN STUMBLING BLOCK, THE DELEGATION WAS ENCOURAGED THAT THE BRUNEI GOVERNMENT WAS WILLING TO DISCUSS THE PROPOSAL AND IT WAS AGREED THAT

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THE DISCUSSIONS WOULD CONTINUE IN LONDON IN MAY OR JUNE.

LORD GORONWY-ROBERTS MADE IT CLEAR THAT A FLAT REJECTION WOULD BE UNACCEPTABLE TO HMG AND THAT THE UK EXPECTED A CONSTRUCTIVE RESPONSE WHEN THEY MEET IN THE SPRING. SIMONS SAID THEY HANDED THE BRUNEI GOVERNMENT A "LOLLYPOP" BY STATING THAT ALTHOUGH THE GHURKA BATTALION WOULD HAVE TO BE WITHDRAWN, UK WAS PREPARED TO CONTINUE TO ASSIST IN BUILDING UP THE STRENGTH OF THE ROYAL BRUNEI REGIMENT AND THAT IT WOULD CONTINUE TO SECOND BRITISH OFFICERS TO THIS REGIMENT.

2. THE DELEGATION SUBSEQUENTLY TRAVELED TO KUALA LUMPUR AND MET WITH ACTING PRIME MINISTER HUSSEIN ONN DURING THE AFTERNOON OF JANUARY 14 (ONLY A FEW HOURS BEFORE NEWS OF RAZAK'S DEATH WAS RECEIVED) IN ORDER TO DISCUSS THE BRUNEI PROBLEM WITH THE GOM. SIMONS SAID HUSSEIN ONN TOLD THE BRITISH QUITE CATEGORICALLY THAT THERE WAS ABSOLUTELY NO REASON FOR BRUNEI TO FEAR MALAYSIA, AND THAT MALAYSIA WOULD NEVER MOUNT A MILITARY ATTACK AGAINST BRUNEI. HOWEVER, HUSSEIN ONN DID INDICATE THAT THE GOM WAS NATURALLY INTERESTED IN ANY DEVELOPMENTS IN BRUNEI WHICH MIGHT AFFECT MALAYSIAN SECURITY, AND MENTIONED IN THIS CONNECTION THE FACT THAT IN RECENT MONTHS ELEMENTS OF SINGAPORE'S ARMED FORCES HAD RECEIVED SOME TRAINING IN BRUNEI. ACCORDING TO SIMONS(X BRITISH DLEEGATIOO POINTED OUT THAT THE PRESENCE IN BRUNEI OF SINGAPORE FORCES WAS ONLY FOR ARTILLERY TRAINING AND THAT THEIR PRESENCE THERE HAD BEEN PURELY TRANSIENT. SIMON'S COMMENTED THAT WHILE THEY HAD BRIEFLY DISCUSSED TUN RAZAK'S HEALTH, HUSSEIN ONN DID NOT APPEAR TO BE PARTICULARLY PERTURBED OR BUSY AND HAD ENCOURAGED THEM TO LINGER BEYOND THE ALLOTTED TIME. HUSSEIN ONN DID NOT GIVE THE SLIGHTEST INDICATION THAT HE WAS AWARE THAT RAZAK'S DEATH WAS IMMINENT.

3. DISCUSSION BETWEEN GORONWY-ROBERTS AND HUSSEIN ONN WAS VERY CIVIL, BUT SIMONS SAID HE CALLED AT MALAYSIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS AND REGISTERED RATHER SHARPLY "AT WORKING LEVEL" BRITISH DISPLEASURE OVER GOM ACTION IN "FACILITATING" AZAHARI'S VISIT TO NEW YORK EARLIER IN THE YEAR TO INFLUENCE THE UNGA ON BRUNEI. WHEN THE MFA OFFICIAL EXPRESSED SOME SURPRISE OVER THE DEGREE OF BRITISH CONCERN, SIMONS SAID HE

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ACIDLY ASKED THE OFFICIAL HOW GOM WOULD LIKE IT IF THE UK FACILITATED CHIN PENG'S TRAVEL TO NEW YORK TO PLEAD THE COMMUNIST INSURGENTS' INTERESTS IN MALAYSIA. HE SAID THE MFA OFFICIAL CLOSED THE SUBJECT BY SAYING "WE TAKE YOUR POINT."

4. SIMONS SAID THE UK DELEGATION INITIALLY THOUGHT IT COULD USE HUSSEIN ONN'S CATEGORICAL ASSURANCES OF GOM

PEACEFUL INTENT TOWARD BRUNEI TO HELP PERSUADE THE
BRUNEI GOVERNMENT TO BELIEVE THAT A CONTINUING BRITISH
MILITARY PRESENCE IS NOT ESSENTIAL TO BRUNEI'S SURVIVAL.
HOWEVER, IN THE LIGHT OF RAZAK'S DEATH, SIMONS WONDERED HOW
MUCH THESE ASSURANCES ARE NOW WORTH.
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